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NEW LIFE FOR THE WESTERN RANGE*

by
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When the people of this country elected Ronald Reagan in the Fall of 1980, their votes spoke loudly of the need for change, and the determination to restore dependability and common sense to government. When the Reagan Administration took office 18 months ago, the first order of the day was to get the Federal Government off the backs of the people; to return decision making to the local level; and, to begin recovering from a deteriorating economic disaster.

Secretary Watt was given the responsibility of returning a sense of balance to the management of Federal lands and resources within the Department of the Interior. Preservation and non-use of public resources would no longer be the top priority. Laws governing the Bureau of Land Management require, again and again, that multiple-use concepts be applied to the management of public lands and resources under this Bureau's jurisdiction.

We believe in those laws. We believe in the conservation -- the wise use -- of our resources. We do not believe in locking up the public lands for some dim and distant and undetermined possibility. These are public lands. They belong to the public -- not to any Government. The Government is only a steward, and should act as a steward -- not as a dictator.

Over the past 18 months, we have applied these philosophies, and have made a good start in pulling that pendulum from single use to multiple use. We'll need your help to keep it there.

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*Presented to the Owyhee Cattlemen's Association Summer Meeting, Silver City, Idaho, July 29, 1982.

On an overall basis, probably the single most effective step ~~we have~~ taken has been the constant effort to cut back and to streamline all those regulations, and the ponderous regulatory process under which the Bureau operates. That step affects every public land resource and every resource user -- whether the use be for fun or for profit. I think you will agree that you're getting more use of those lands and resources than you did before, and that it's not as difficult as it used to be.

In every area of the Bureau's myriad responsibilities -- in range management, in planning, in mining, coal, oil and gas, geothermal and dozens of other areas -- we're simplifying the process and paying more attention to the people we serve.

We're also working very hard to actively generate and maintain close coordination and cooperation with the people we serve and with State and local governments.

In the field of range management, for example, true communications between the rancher, the Bureau and those special interest groups concerned that the public range continue to be a national resource, are absolutely vital. We all need that dialogue if we want results.

Your organization is a prime example of how much such a communicative effort can accomplish. The Owyhee cattlemen have been pathfinders in this area. Your group has had more than 20 years experience in cooperative range management and improvement. It is a goal that we should all be working toward, and working toward it together. Your input, your cooperation is making it easier for the Bureau to serve you effectively. We do appreciate all of the efforts you are making to help us do that.

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Most of you know that we adopted a new grazing policy early this year. It is based on a concept we call "selective management", and allow us to make more efficient use of public resources by concentrating major efforts and expenditures on those areas where the range will show the greatest improvement.

This new policy also allows those livestock operators who have proven their ability and intent to effectively manage their allotments to have more latitude -- and less government interference -- in how those allotments are used. In addition, we are proposing consultations between the Bureau managers and the lessees to give operators a greater role in management decisions.

Since the new policy was adopted, we have produced two draft environmental impact statements, detailing impacts that could be expected when this policy is applied to the rangeland environment. As soon as these statements have been reviewed, and public comment received and weighed, we will be issuing the final EISs and can start to make management decisions based on the new policy.

We have also initiated new policies regarding the distribution of the \$100 funds. According to law, a portion of the collected grazing fees must be returned to the local grazing district for range improvements. Under our new policy, however, this money will now be used for "on the ground" improvements in the grazing district where the money is collected. The administrative and other costs will now be paid out of other funds.

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The net results of these policy changes will be to give the livestock operator more benefits, in the form of improvements on his particular

These properties are being identified locally through the Bureau's land use planning process -- not a new process, at all, and one with which you should all be thoroughly familiar. About 300,000 acres in Idaho have already been identified as potentially available for this program. Again, let me stress that many of the parcel identifications were made with input from the local people as part of the public participation process that accompanied any land use plan over the past few years.

Through that same planning process, we will continue to identify properties for possible disposal. But, I must caution you to remember we are still making the initial inventory cut. We will be in no position to offer many lands or properties for sale until about the 1984 fiscal year. For one thing, identified or not, each one of these properties still has to be appraised, still has to have title clearance, and still has to have other pre-sale actions completed. It's just like selling a house or a business: until you have completed certain legal requirements, you cannot possibly put a price on it or sell it!

By the beginning of fiscal year 1984, we should have these things in place and be able to start acceleration of the Asset Management program. By then, funds will be available for the necessary extra planning, appraisal, and sale effort. Decisions on these sales will be made at the local level through state and local government and public input, and everybody will have a chance to express opinions and advice. We will certainly welcome it.

If you have any questions about our programs, I will be glad to try and give you the answers you need.

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